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NEWS RELEASE

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Environment Department Monitoring Air Quality In Los Alamos

Members of the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED), in conjunction with Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Forest Service are actively monitoring air quality around Los Alamos as a result of the ongoing Las Conchas Fire.

During this fire event, the Environment Department staff will conduct continuous air monitoring, maintain monitoring capabilities and expedite analysis of the particulate measurements. In addition to sampling devices at fixed locations, the Bureau has a mobile, solar powered, air monitoring station that can be deployed at optimum locations without regard for an external power supply. This device is currently located at the Los Alamos Airport.

Environment Department staff is conducting continuous air quality monitoring for radioactive particles and tritium using low-volume air pumps. Particulates are collected on filters and analyzed for radioactive particles, metals and organic compounds. High-volume air pumps are also deployed at environmental restoration clean-up sites and decommissioning and demolition operations to independently monitor particulate emissions in air.

LANL personnel are currently conducting air monitoring for particulate matter and radionuclides around Los Alamos. Current air quality index information for conditions at LANL can be viewed at http://environweb.lanl.gov/Teom/teom.asp. Historical data and monitoring station location can be viewed at http://environweb.lanl.gov/newnet/gamma/stabyloc.aspx. The Environment Department, working with the EPA and LANL, is in the process of moving four additional particulate monitors from California to northern New Mexico. The Environment Department will work with the Forest Service and EPA to determine where those monitors should be placed to maximize their effectiveness.

In addition, LANL has radiation monitors that can be used to monitor for possible radiation contamination from the fire. The Environment Department is also working with the EPA and LANL to obtain

additional ground-based monitors and an airborne monitor. Some of those monitors will be set up in Santa Fe and Espanola.

During the Cerro Grande fire of 2000, there was considerable public concern regarding the potential release of radionuclides from LANL. The following risk summary is from the "2002 Fact Sheet: Cerro Grande Fire Releases to Air" which may be viewed at ftp://ftp.nmenv.state.nm.us/www/doe/publications/lanl/2002FireAirFactSheet.pdf

> "The primary health risks during the Cerro Grande fire were associated with breathing materials released into the air. It was estimated the risk of cancer from breathing any LANL-derived chemical or radioactive material that may have been carried in the smoke plume to be less than 1 chance in 10 million. Potential exposures in the surrounding communities to LANL-derived chemicals that are not carcinogenic were about 10 times lower than acceptable intakes established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The risk of cancer from breathing chemicals and radioactive materials in and on the natural vegetation that burned in the Cerro Grande Fire was greater than that from LANL derived materials, but still less than 1 chance in 1 million. The vegetation that burned contained naturally occurring chemicals and radioactive materials and radioactive fallout produced during atmospheric tests of nuclear weapons. These materials and the risks they posed are present during any forest fire. The evidence suggests that some adverse health effects did result from breathing high concentrations of particulate matter in the smoke. Such exposures are associated with any forest fire. Deposition of LANL-derived chemicals and radioactive materials from the smoke plume to the soil was minimal.

Additional information may be obtained from other reports published by the department at http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/doe_oversight/pubs.htm

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